U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Statement on Mozambique's Destruction of Ivory and Rhino Horn
July 10, 2015

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) commends Mozambique for taking a public stand against illegal wildlife trade this week by destroying 2.4 tons of elephant ivory and 86 pieces of rhino horn weighing more than 420 pounds. We are hopeful this signifies a renewed commitment to combat poaching and wildlife trafficking. Mozambique represents the tenth country to engage in destruction of confiscated illegal ivory since the Service held its first ivory crush in November 2013.

Rampant poaching is taking its toll within Mozambique and on neighboring countries. Mozambique has lost 48 percent of its elephants in just the past five years. Recent surveys revealed there are only 10,300 elephants left in the country. To the west of Mozambique, rhino poaching in South Africa skyrocketed from seven rhinos poached in 2000 to 1,215 rhinos poached in 2014. Poaching also affects the rangers who put their lives on the line to defend these animals.

Mozambique has experienced a number of significant thefts of seized ivory and rhino horn, and we recognize the intended merit of destroying this stockpile not only to signal how seriously Mozambique is taking this issue but also to prevent any potential re-entry of these confiscated items into illegal trade.

Although this is a commendable action, we are concerned by reports that the rhino horn destroyed by Mozambique may have been from cases still under investigation and could have provided valuable forensic evidence. In addition, it's unclear whether Mozambique followed standard investigative and prosecutorial procedures recommended by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) for dealing with seized rhinoceros horn.

The Government of Mozambique's decision to publicly destroy their confiscated ivory and rhino horn should help send a clear message that poaching and wildlife trafficking will no longer be tolerated.